

Dear President Aponte and Honorable Members of the New Jersey State Board of Education:

What an incredible school year this is turning out to be. The several localities have been thankful for the strong leadership of Commissioner Repollet and his "NJDOE 2.0" team. The messaging of support for (and service to) the localities is a breath of fresh air as we have rediscovered what is truly important in Public Education that is accountable to the community served.

When we think back to how we were misled by a former Commissioner of Education who had practically invented the for-profit charter school model and had taken the SBOE position in bad faith, surreptitiously developing and using mundane made-up metrics that became nothing more than an institutionalized poll literacy test to destroy purposefully underfunded urban public school districts in order to privatize public services and displace locals with "luxury" rentals, it is embarrassing that we ever so bamboozled. That he left for one of the companies that sought to profit off of the changes that he implemented over the cries of the responsible local Public Education stakeholders who converged in protest on Trenton from across the State, is nothing less than a sad reflection of our own lack of systemic Control over the process. Thankfully, that era is over.

It is so wonderful that the State Board of Education is taking the time to meticulously dismantle the PARCC-brand methodology. We should take great care over the next several weeks to delineate the abject failures of the philosophy of standardized testing in general, and then definitively give the necessary thirty days notice that is required for us to finally drop this albatross "for the convenience of the State" (see Section 6.g.1. at <http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1688079-w94506-15-r-23729-nj-participating-addendum.html>).

One of the clear problems with the PARCC-brand methodology (other than the fact that it was poorly designed, the questions were poorly written, it made us lose focus on what was important, and it was not scientifically validated) was that it didn't tell us any answers that we didn't already know. In our community schools, we have retained knowledgeable professionals to work hands-on with our children. The standardized test scores are remote one-dimensional measurements that correlate to the wealth and education of the parents of the test-taker. There is no overcoming that institutional bias. But the minds of these kids are all still plastic. If we can get them in the door and fill their bellies with nutritious food, we can fill their minds with the natural curiosity that is required to sustain vibrant healthy communities through the generations. This is why public education that is accountable to the community served is a vital instrument of democracy. And this is why we have protected this vital public institution from privatization in our State Constitution. With a new economic model, we can even recognize the value that is actually created by robust investment in accountable public infrastructure. Welcome a new approach.

One more thing... What are the answers that we are looking for? It seems silly to keep doing the same test over and over again expecting it to produce a different result. We *know* what an excellent Public Education *looks* like. We need the State Board of Education to support the several localities in accountably building that out. In the process, we could develop live, active assessments that engage the several Public Education stakeholders to come together and creatively solve Real World problems on a perennial basis. How rewarding would it be to actually solve the underlying socioeconomic problems exposed by standardized testing? There are such wonderful opportunities to drive constant innovation.

Anyway, even though a lot of people think it is backwards, thank you for taking a deep dive into what remains of PARCC. If we turn the soil, we can plant the seeds for rich organic growth in the new year. How may I help?

Thank you to everyone on the State Board of Education for your continued service. Let's set new Real World standards of excellence for facilities, staffing, and programming in the Public Schools so that the rest of the country may turn their heads and ask, "Wait, *what's* going on in Public Education in New Jersey?" What an incredible opportunity this is. We are all thankful for really strong leadership.

Have a great weekend.

Very truly yours,

Justin Escher Alpert
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